

Freshwater Future Testimony on the Future State of the Wetlands Protection Program
March 17, 2009

Joint House Committee Meeting: Great Lakes and Environment, Rep. Rebekah Warren, Chair and
Environmental Quality of the Standing Committee on Appropriations, Rep. Doug Bennett, Chair

Hello, my name is Ben Tompkins and I am an AmeriCorps Member representing Freshwater Future. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present our concerns about Governor Granholm's proposal to cut Michigan's wetlands program.

Freshwater Future invests in the people and communities caring for our Great Lakes waters. With a focus on community action groups and individuals, we provide professional assistance, funding and access to a broad network of resources and information. Since 1996, Freshwater Future has helped nearly 2,000 local groups and individuals make a difference in their community.

We all share a responsibility for the future of our Great Lakes. Once known as the Sweetwater Seas, the Great Lakes comprise the largest source of fresh water in the world. Our history and our heritage are all linked to the Great Lake landscape. But, these cherished waters are being damaged by untreated sewage, industrial pollutant and invasive species. Compounding these problems is the destruction of wetlands, of which 2/3 have been lost in the Great Lakes region. Here in Michigan, according to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources website, the estimated 11 million acres of Michigan wetlands existing in pre settlement times have now been reduced to less than 3 million acres. Governor Granholm's plan to return the wetland protection program to the federal government in an attempt to balance the budget would likely result in an estimated 930,856 acres of wetlands - approximately 17 percent of Michigan's remaining wetland resources - going unprotected. This plan is penny wise but pound foolish. It will be a devastating blow to Michigan's waters, fish, wildlife, people and the Great Lakes themselves.

The Importance of Wetlands to Michigan's Waters and the Great Lakes

Because they occur where the dry land meets the water, wetlands play a critical role in the management of our water-based resources. Acre for acre, wetlands produce more wildlife and plants than any other Michigan habitat type. To give you an example of how important wetlands are to Michigan's plants and wildlife, consider the fact the while Michigan boasts about 2300 native plant species; 50 percent of these are wetland species of which over 25 percent are threatened or endangered. More than 40 percent of the 575 vertebrate (with a backbone) wildlife species in Michigan live in or utilize wetlands. This includes 10 to 15 of Michigan's 66 mammals, 180 of the 370 Michigan birds, 22 of the 28 Michigan reptiles, and all 23 of Michigan's amphibians. And consider all the other things wetlands do such as:

- Reduce flooding by absorbing runoff from rain and melting snow, slowly releasing excess water into rivers and lakes. For example, a one acre swamp when flooded to a depth of one foot contains 330,000 gallons of water. To give you an idea of how much water that really is, that is enough water to meet the daily supply of 1,250 average homes. (<http://www.aboutnewbern.com/water.htm>) During a storm event this is water that, without wetlands, would run off into our streams and rivers, leading to flooding and related damages. In a report entitled "Protection of Small, Isolated Wetlands in Michigan" by R. Jan Stevens, it is noted that thirty-three studies over the past 20 years have put an estimated value on wetlands of up to \$22,050 per acre for flood control and water quality treatment.
- Wetlands filter pollution from surface runoff, trapping fertilizers, pesticides, sediments, and other contaminants and helping to break some of them down into less harmful substances, improving water clarity and quality.